THE WASHINGTON POST
8 DEC 1968

An Inside Look at Our Espionage Network

THE SUPER SPIES

Andrew Tully

(Morrow, 256 pp., $5.95)

Reviewed by William A. Korns

A former newsman, Korns recently left the Senate after four years as a legislative assistant.

The Pueblo affair alerted many Americans for the first time to the existence of the National Security Agency, an arm of the Defense Department charged with penetrating the communications of other nations and protecting those of the United States. Now, in what his publishers have billed as "The Inside Story of NSA, America's Biggest, Most Secret, Most Powerful Spy Agency," Andrew Tully, former Scripps-Howard writer and veteran popularizer of "inside stories" ("White Tie and Dagger," "CIA: The Inside Story") sets out to satisfy the national appetite for exposes.

It should not trouble anyone that only one of Tully's 16 chapters deals directly with NSA. It tells a great deal more about the work of the agency than was known to most Americans, but probably less than is known to the Soviets, to whom two NSA cryptologists defected in 1960.

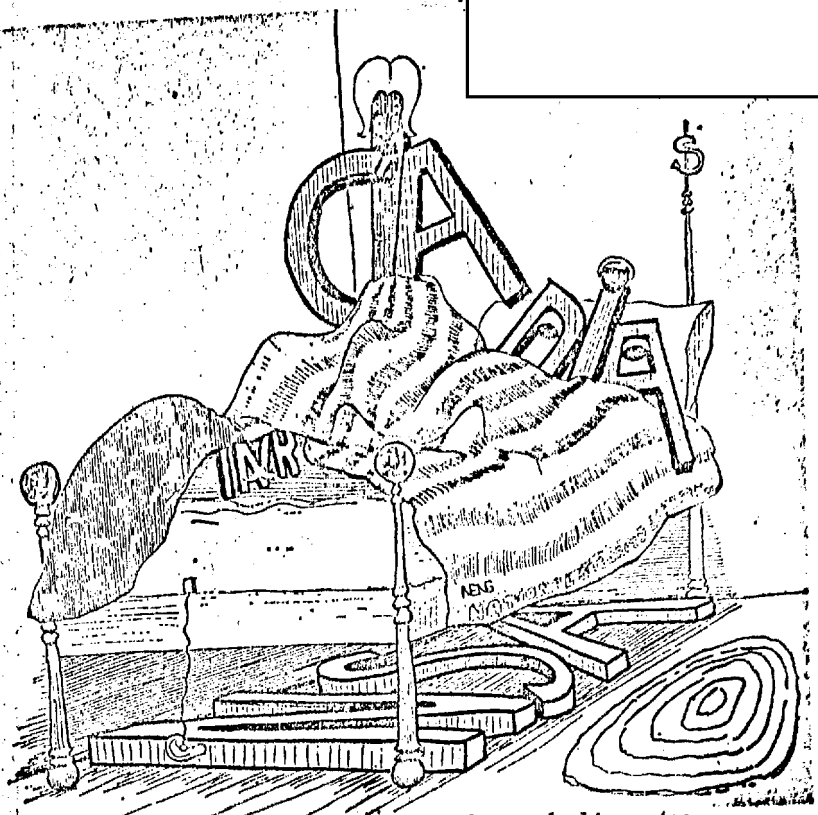
Some of the information is less than startling: The fact that NSA employes report for work in three shifts—at 7:20, 7:40 and 8 a.m.—reveals more about highway and parking-lot conditions than about codes and ciphers. On the other hand, Tully's assertion that NSA "probably spends twice as much" as the Central Intelligence Agency (which he credits with $750 million)—while lacking the authority of an open-budget document—indicates the high cost of technological innovations in the field of global surveillance.

For the rest, Tully has assembled a potpourri of facts, anecdotes and purported case histories of the espionage activities of the several agencies that make up the American intelligence community, seasoned it with an ample fund of secret ingredients and served it up in a breezy yet credible fashion.

Whether all of the exploits he attributes to operatives of the NSA, CIA, DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) or INR (the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research) in fact occurred as related may be doubted by Washington insiders. But if Tully has embellished his account to any degree for lack of ability to check out every detail, there is no objective basis on which to question the main thrust of his book—that the taxpayer is supporting a very large, diversified and highly competitive intelligence apparatus (costing more than $4 billion a year, Tully says) in the name of national security.

Advance information on the capabilities and intentions of a hostile power seems so patently desirable that one is not inclined to question the cost. Yet some of Tully's stories do raise the question, inferentially, by illustrating that the utility of intelligence rests on far more than its accuracy or timeliness. Thanks to an unsung CIA Agent in East Germany, says Tully, the U.S. acquired microfilms in May, 1968, showing "in amazing detail" the Soviet Union's plan to invade and occupy Czechoslovakia, and both U.S. and West German authorities recommended "leaking" the plan to mobilize world opinion against the Soviets.

"But Ambassador Lodge had orders from Washington," writes Tully, "and he turned thumbs down on the proposal. The war in Vietnam, said Lodge, had so complicated the international situation that the United States could not afford to engage in a brinkmanship contest with the Soviet Union. Should such information be leaked, he said, the United States would be forced to issue a strong statement, warning Russia to desist. Washington just did not want to get into such a situation at this time, Lodge said."



It is somewhat disconcerting to learn from Tully that, in 1967, Soviet leaders were telling "neutral diplomats they could not believe either increased bombing or commitment of more U.S. troops could achieve a military victory, and thus there was nothing for the rest of the world to do but wait for the United States to stop the escalation of a 'senseless and dirty war'." Had that intelligence been given more weight, both the United States and Vietnam might have been better served.

It is, in fact, how intelligence is weighed that will most often determine its impact on policy. Rarely is there so much incontrovertible evidence in hand that only one conclusion can emerge, so elaborate procedures exist within the intelligence community for producing consensus on such prickly questions as Soviet intentions in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the public has no assurance that the system is the best for the nation. As Tully shows, correctly, "Congress has shied away from looking too deeply into the finances, activities and influence of the intelligence community on foreign policy, on the grounds it should not hamper or compromise" secret operations.

This, too, may change. This year's ABM debate brought home to many Senators the high costs of basing weapons policies on "worst possible" estimates of Soviet intentions. Sen. Symington's Foreign Relations subcommittee, now burrowing into U.S. base agreements around the world, is finding intelligence operations to be a large part of the picture.

But if a Congress grown leery of "national commitments" is likely to probe a bit more deeply into intelligence matters in the future, don't look for big savings. The same Congressmen who question our global military deployment look to arms control measures for enhanced security, and, if these are to be effective, they concede, we must have the means, unilaterally, to verify compliance with any agreements. In short, more and better intelligence.